



Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays

EDMONTON

January 1997

NEXT MEETING:

Tuesday, January 21, 1997

7:30 pm

Suite 103, 10612 - 124 St.

(Parking is available both at the back of the building and on the street.)

We plan to have a wonderful lesbian speaker give a 10 to 15 minute presentation on the challenges she faced growing up in a heterosexual world. She will answer any questions from the group, after which the monthly support meeting will begin.

Everyone welcome! Coffee and homemade goodies will be served.

For more information please call:

Chairperson: Lynne, [REDACTED]
Newsletter Editor: Ellen, [REDACTED]

All mail should be sent to:
[REDACTED]



CANADIAN PFLAGS

There are now over thirty PFLAG groups in Canada. A few have already responded to our request to share their views and activities with the other Canadian groups for mutual support and "enlightenment". (Please keep your letters coming!)

PFLAG Amherst, N.S.

A monthly meeting of some 8 to 15 persons - two hours, third Thursday each month. A good deal of pre-publicity of meetings.

A firm executive not yet in place, but we're working on it. Two co-leaders. We rejoice in seeing parents and others grow in understanding, tolerance, acceptance. Eldon Hay

PFLAG Moncton, N.B.

We meet on the third Thursday of each month for a couple of hours. Good network of pre-publicity of meetings. A strong executive could help shape and sharpen our efforts. Two co-leaders. A robust group for young gays, lesbians and bisexuals is forming in the city - great need and great news.

Eldon Hay

Email: [REDACTED]

PFLAG Saskatoon

...After only 4 meetings we can see the encouragement and knowledge-sharing bearing fruit. Every month more people have "come out" to family, co-workers, etc. No one has met with confrontation or rejection so far!

Three of us mothers made a presentation to 5 members of our

Please share this newsletter

Government's Caucus Committee on Health and Welfare. It was the first time any of us had ever done anything this public in this area. We got a very warm reception, and we felt quite satisfied that we had said all the things we wanted to communicate. We were told after not to underestimate the power of mothers speaking for their children. We were 'non-threatening' and the care and concern really came thru. They asked us to make a presentation to the Provincial Cabinet at their next meeting in the New Year and to bring some of the staff of our Gay and Lesbian Health Services along. We had stressed that their agency needed help to meet the costs of their 1-800 phone number for access for our kids isolated in rural areas and small villages - and core funding so high school students would have a place to go for counseling and to feel secure in being themselves....

We appreciate the warm welcoming letters and immediate help from other PFLAG groups. It is an inspiration!

Thankyou again for your encouragement and your huge packet of material. It is being put to good use. It really does feel like cross-country team effort.

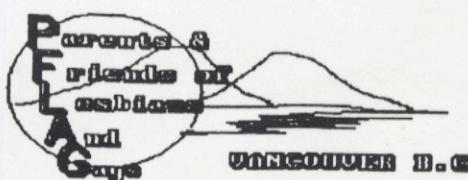
Myrna

PFLAG Vancouver

Our Vancouver newsletter editor, recuperating from a long illness, writes:

PFLAG Vancouver has done the following:

- Spoken at the Unitarian Church - seven of us spoke to the gay group there and were very well received;
- Had a display table at U.B.C. during Out Week; different people "manned" the display table for 2 days. Very well received.
- Have formed a steering committee to help myself and the group.
- Spoke at the Gay and Lesbian Centre's Youth group - we do this every year.



- Had a booth and display at the Stonewall Festival held every June.
- Were interviewed on TV for Pride Week and marched in the Pride Parade (It rained for the second year in a row!)
- Spoke to the Vancouver Theological Campus at U.B.C. (interesting)
- One of our members went to the AIDS conference;
- To date the decision to get a tax number is "iffy". We can't do advocacy and we've

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committed heart and soul to do advocacy work;

- Two of our members, a mother and a son, spoke to VESTA, Vancouver Elementary School Teachers' Association; they made such an impact. We're finding schools awfully reluctant to hear about homosexuality, but a 17 year old boy took his life a couple of months ago, after coming out to his mother. This seems to have galvanized everyone to get moving and get public. We seem to have distributed thousands of pamphlets and brochures yet people are surprised to find out about us.
- In the coming year we intend to focus on fund raising so we can either fund or partially fund someone to attend the conference in Orlando;
- Also we have been strongly urged to get the video "It's Elementary"*

G. Stevens

*Editor's note: "It's Elementary" is available from-

By mail:

**Women's Educational Media Order Dept,
2180 Bryant St.,
Suite 203, San Francisco, CA
94110, U.S.A.**

By Fax:

415-641-4632 (Visa or MasterCard only); 24 hrs/ day

International Orders Note:
Please include a credit card
number for International
shipping costs. (Price:
Corporations, \$400 US; School
District / College / University,
\$250 US; Individual School, \$99
US; Local Community Group,
\$99 US. Shipping and Handling,
\$9 US.

Tel. 415-641-4616

E-mail: wemdhc@aol.com

Website: www.womedia.org

The Los Angeles Reader's Bruce Mirken gave the following report after seeing *It's Elementary*:

What's the Big Whoop?

"Family values" are big these days. Politicians, even alleged liberals, quake in their boots at the mention of gay marriage, and the Southern Baptists are gearing up to boycott Disney because the entertainment megalith is supposedly too friendly to homosexuals. Much of this is being justified as necessary to "protect children."

It was into this emotional cauldron that filmmaker Debra Chasnoff dove last year, wanting to make a documentary about how elementary schools approach the topic of homosexuality. No wonder school administrators across the country barred their doors in terror.

This is not the first time Chasnoff has plunged into controversial territory. When she

won a 1991 Oscar for *Deadly Deception: General Electric, Nuclear Weapons and Our Environment*, she acknowledged her lover in her acceptance speech, becoming the first lesbian to come out on an Academy Awards telecast - and then called on the audience to boycott General Electric. Chasnoff seems naturally attracted to topics that raise the blood pressure of more cautious types.

The result of her most recent labors is *It's Elementary*, a funny, touching, and fascinating documentary...Filming in a handful of schools around the country...Chasnoff captured how some creative and dedicated teachers approach a topic many schools still prefer to avoid entirely.

"If the educational system doesn't deal with all of these issues early on, (then) there's gay-bashing in the streets."

Not surprisingly, the true pearls of wisdom in *It's Elementary* come from the kids..."Who really cares if you're gay?" one girl says. "What's the big whoop?" Later an eighth-grade girl declares, "If kids are too young to be taught about homosexuality, then they're too young to be taught about heterosexuality."

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But why even discuss homosexuality in elementary schools? Aren't these kids too young for that sort of thing? It's a common question, Chasnoff says. "Most adults have this idea that 'gay' isn't a subject that's relevant to kids' lives or that they need to think about. But the reality is they're already exposed to it and dealing with it. It's irresponsible not to give them an appropriate forum."

Indeed, notes Chasnoff - a parent herself - kids hear about it enough in the media and from friends that "faggot" has become a common playground epithet. And, as one teacher in the film puts it, "If the educational system doesn't deal with all of these issues early on, there's gay-bashing in the streets."

The film skillfully demystifies the idea of approaching gay issues in the classroom - particularly the common misapprehension that discussing gay people means teaching children about sex. Chasnoff shows teachers introducing the subject in a variety of ways, like asking the kids what comes to mind when they hear the words *gay* or *lesbian*, or asking them if they've ever experienced prejudice. The children consistently come across as interested, aware, and far more levelheaded than most adults.

One teacher opens the discussion by introducing his students to

some famous gays and lesbians. After going through a handful of historical figures, including Michelangelo, he plays a song and asks the students if they recognize it, which of course they do. "That's from *The Lion King!*" several excited young voices call out.

"And do you know who it is singing?"

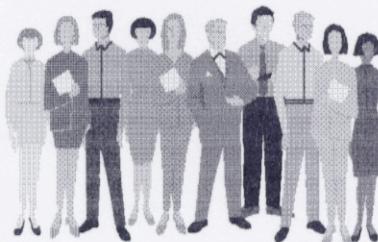
"Elton John!" several students answer.

"Did you know Elton John was a gay man?" the teacher asks, and the kids are flabbergasted. Several shout their surprise, while one young girl simply stares in drop-jawed disbelief...

Chasnoff says it was a struggle to be allowed to film in schools because of the "waves of terror" the subject of homosexuality sends through even the most liberal educators. Teachers and administrators feared that, when word got out, "all hell would break loose and parents would be banging down the door the next day." One of the film's purposes is to quiet anxieties around the subject and make life easier for those who want to approach it responsibly.

If the early response to *It's Elementary* is any indication, Chasnoff may succeed. The June 5 world premiere in San Francisco was received so enthusiastically that even the director was blown away, commenting, "I've really been taken aback by the intensity of people's positive reactions."

After a handful of screenings at gay film festivals and other venues during the summer and fall, she and coproducer Helen Cohen hope to get the film aired on PBS's *POV* series next year (1997).



PFLAG Edmonton

Since our November newsletter Edmonton members have been kept busy as follows:

- Nov 5 - Regular business meeting;
- Nov 9 & 10 - Display table at the new U of A Timms Centre during *Angels in America; Part I*. Talked with several people including a teacher in rural Alberta who planned to teach a unit on sexual orientation to combat the violence perpetrated against them at her school;
- Nov 12 - Display table and speakers at a Grant McEwan College *Issues in Youth* class (22 students); speakers included lesbian, gay, & transgendered people and parents of same;
- Nov 19 - Regular support meeting. Roxy gave a short but very interesting talk about her life as a
- Nov 22 - Two PFLAG moms attended a beautiful Integrity (Lutheran) service for lesbian, gay and bisexual people - held in an Anglican church. A very moving service!
- Nov 25 - Display table and speakers at a Grant McEwan student social services class (44 students). Speakers were similar to the Nov 12 presentation with the exception that two transgendered people spoke, one male-to-female and the others female-to-male. The former is a successful business man in town who held the students spellbound with his "story". Students were asked to write down questions at the break which led to more than an hour of discussion afterwards. This class eagerly took all the literature from the display table. Definitely one of our most satisfactory presentations.
- Dec. 2 - Our PFLAG Spokesperson, along with one gay and one lesbian representative from "the community" met with Mayor Smith to discuss the negative effects of homophobia on life in Edmonton (see Mayors Remarks Offensive, page 5).
- Dec 5 - Our PFLAG Education Director met with

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transgendered person. A total of thirty people attended this meeting, three of them being "first timers".

the Staff Sergeant of South Division to discuss the impact homophobic police school resource officers have on lesbian, bisexual, gay and transgendered students at their schools. As there was no commonality in their views the matter was referred to the next higher level.

- Dec 6 - Over thirty lesbian, gay and transgendered people and parents attended the annual PFLAG Christmas party catered at Jazzberry's. There was great food, much music, talk and laughter.
 - Dec 10 - Two PFLAG parents attended a display table for our group at Edmonton's first International Human Rights Day celebrations held at Canada Place. Entertainment was provided by Edmonton Vocal Minority, The Raging Grannies and other groups. The event was a great success!
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MAYOR'S REMARKS

OFFENSIVE

On the evening of Dec. 2, 1996 Fred Dicker, Christie Harcourt and I (Lynne) went to see Mayor Bill Smith. As Fred mentioned, it was an experience in contradiction and the ridiculous. Smith stated he would never, ever proclaim a day for gay and lesbian community celebration unless forced to do so by

legislation. In the same breath, he stated he is against discrimination for any reason. He definitely will not accept the community as identifiable, however he seemed enthused to be invited to meetings and Community events. He also wants to be informed about any incidents of discrimination by individuals from the gay and lesbian community. Why bother with such trivialities when he is ready to pre-judge any visible minority?

Mayor Smith proclaimed that violence towards women is the biggest crime in this city. However he stated that if he owned an apartment building, he would not rent to two persons of the same sex, especially women. He said there would be too much noise and traffic of men coming and going at all hours of the night. By making a statement such as this, I cannot help but think he is only adding to the problem, not promoting any semblance of a solution. Needless to say, this was a very enlightening evening in that it showed the Mayor's true colors.

Letters regarding this fiasco were written to the Journal both by Fred, on behalf of the Gay and Lesbian Community Centre, and myself, on behalf of PFLAG. If we do not take a stand when we are incensed and offended by remarks from any public official, then we are only adding to the nonsense and confusion.

The Mayor expressed an interest in attending one of our meetings, so trust me when I tell you, his

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invitation is forthcoming! It will be well publicized in the Community and it is my hope that when this takes place we will fill the room to capacity and people will enlighten the mayor as to the incredible challenges faced by gay & lesbian people and their families here in Edmonton.

See you there!

PHYSICIANS SUPPORT GAYS - in Rural Alberta!

(Courtesy Perceptions, Dec4, 1996, *Debate Rages in Alberta*)

(Olds) A raucous debate raged on in the pages of *The Olds Albertan* and the *Sundre Round-up* during September. The debate began when five brave Sundre physicians, Drs. Hal Irvine, Jim Thompson, Carol Rowntree, Glenn Kowalsky and Alan White wrote a letter which was printed in the *Albertan*.

"We, the physicians of Sundre, feel the need to make a public statement on the topic of 'gays,'" the letter began. "The MP for our areas, Myron Thompson, has recently had his opinion stated publicly. We take this opportunity as physicians to educate our community on what good medical research has discovered about this aspect of human relationships, and we want our gay patients, colleagues and neighbours to know that we do not support 'hate' statements about them."

The doctors went on to discuss how being gay was indeed natural; how hate and intolerance are responsible for

high rates of suicides with lesbian and gay teens; the fallacy of the recruitment and paedophile myths; and the faulty logic used by Reform MP Dr. Grant Hill when he claimed that the "homosexual lifestyle" was unhealthy.

They pointed out how "homosexuals" lives and lifestyles are really not different from heterosexuals' lives and lifestyles." They closed by welcoming "gay and lesbian people and their partners in our practices" as well as encouraging teens in the process of coming out to know they can 'turn to us for helpful counselling.' They also recommended *Is it a Choice?* as good reading material on the topic....

ON THE BOOKSHELF

Straight Parents/Gay Children, 1996

by Bob Bernstein,
PFLAG Parent

Condensed from PFLAG Flyer,
Houston, TX, Jan, 1997

A popular book by the father of a lesbian daughter ... portrays families who feel their lives have been enriched by having gay children....

"This book tells the very personal and vital story of how--in the face of a massive social tide of misinformation and hostility toward a beleaguered minority - many of these young people have become models of

honesty, courage and decency for their families and friends."

Reviews on the book include:

- (Kirkus) a compelling portrait of straight parents' moving toward celebrating difference and speaking out against injustice.
- (Washington Blade) a succinct, moving book about parents who have defied the social stigma of homosexuality to publicly support their gay children.
- (Novelist Armistead Maupin) an invaluable book (showing) the parents of gay children how to stop merely tolerating their kids and start being their heroes. Is there any higher goal for a parent?

This book carries an introduction by Robert MacNeil of the MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour, whose gay son, Ian, is an award-winning set designer on the London and Broadway stages.

EVENTS CALENDAR

EVM MARDI GRAS

Fringe Theatre Bus Barns

10330 - 84 Ave.

Saturday, February 22, 1997

7:00 pm

It's major party time - a **Mardi Gras Cabaret!** Complete with showy costumes, renowned entertainers, unrestrained

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laughter, fiery dancing, cool refreshments, extraordinary prizes, and an animated **Silent Auction!**

EVM's annual fundraiser has been sold-out the last two years - don't be disappointed, get your tickets early. Subscribers will receive priority seating at the best tables in the newly renovated Bus Barns.

Ph. [REDACTED]

Fax [REDACTED]

e-mail:
evm@freenet.edmonton.ab.ca

GAY MEN'S WEDNESDAY COFFEE EVENINGS

Last year after completing a GMOC Wednesday evening workshop we kept on meeting over coffee and cake. It was a good chance to relax, joke, be serious, and seek companions for other outings.

These coffee evenings have spawned group outings to fund raising events, the Princess Theatre, parties, a concert, and a potluck. We've even had two members of our original group fall in love and start a gay family!

To make contact phone Graham at [REDACTED] or just ask for us in the nonsmoking side (right, one step down as you enter) of Breadstick Cafe. From 7:30 on...every Wednesday Evening.

Next PFLAG business mtg: Feb. 4, 1997 @ 7:00 pm. GLCC.

Visitors and guests have no vote but are encouraged to participate or observe.

It's a Gay Life!

January 1997

FAMILIES - OF LES/BI/GAY/TRANS YOUTH

Courtesy of *The Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth*, February 25, 1993.

"On reflecting about homosexuality, I've learned that:

- my religious tradition taught me to believe that my son was a sinner;
- my medical support system taught me to believe that my son was sick;
- my educational system taught me that my son was abnormal;
- my legal system views my son and his partner in an unsanctioned relationship without legal rights and protection that are afforded my married daughter;
- my family, immediate and extended, provided no acknowledgment or support for having a gay relative in its midst;
- my major communication sources treated homosexuality as deviant."....James Genasci, father of a gay son, testifying at the Public Hearings.

Families, and parents particularly, are profoundly



affected when a child or sibling is gay or lesbian. The expected course of family life is changed irrevocably. And the course it takes, the new actions and attitudes it assumes toward the gay/lesbian teen, can mean the difference between life and death.

Out to the Family

If the gay/lesbian teen reveals his or her identity, the family unit is often deeply shaken. It must revise its image of the teen, but also of itself as a unit. The family must deal with the many

feelings that follow, and the reactions of extended family and community.

The Family in the Closet

The family must cope with how the world reacts to them as a family with a gay or lesbian member, as well as to the teen himself/herself. The organization PFLAG, a group that provides support for parents and family members of gay and lesbian people, finds that often families go into the closet when their gay/lesbian child comes out. The pain and isolation experienced by family members of gay and lesbian youth in many ways parallel the aloneness of the gay family member.

"We began, perhaps worst of all, to live the lie. This is the extremely stressful experience of monitoring everything you say lest you reveal what cannot be revealed, and then lying to hide the truth...Lying breeds self-loathing, so you begin to avoid those to whom you must lie."

--Sandra Bayne, testifying at the Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth's Public Hearings.

Silence, Ignorance, Avoidance

Families often have no realistic conception of what it means to be gay or lesbian or to have a loved one who is lesbian or gay. They have been exposed to stereotypes of gays and lesbians and rarely have read accurate books or articles about gay/lesbian people.

Three themes which have permeated society's attitudes and treatment of young gays or lesbian are: silence, ignorance, and avoidance.

Society usually talks about homosexuality in a pejorative sense and avoids the presence and needs of young gays and lesbians. The result of this atmosphere is a family in denial and in great distress.

Often when families learn that a son or daughter is gay or lesbian, the reaction is shame and guilt. Without support or knowledge, they feel confused and alone.

Suicide and Its Effect on Families

The devastating effect of suicide, or suicide attempts, on the family unit cannot be overestimated. Mary Griffith's son, Bobby, killed himself at age 20 by jumping off an overpass onto a highway.

Mary Griffith had been a Christian Fundamentalist. When she and her husband found out that Bobby was gay when he was sixteen, they tried to "cure"

him through prayer and a Christian counselor. Since her son's death, Mary has come to regret that her family did not accept Bobby's gay identity.

"We never thought of a gay person as an equal, lovable, and valuable part of God's creation. What a travesty of God's unconditional love...Had I viewed my son's life with a pure heart, I would have recognized him as a tender spirit in God's eyes." ---Mary Griffith, mother of a gay son who committed suicide.

"A wonderful child, with an incredible mind, is gone because our society can't accept people who are 'different' from the norm. What an awful waste. I will miss my daughter for the rest of my life. I'll never see her play with her sister again. All because of hatred and ignorance. I strongly believe that the seeds of hate are sown early in life. Let's replace them with love, understanding and compassion. We have no choice: this terrible tragedy will continue to repeat itself and someday it may be your wonderful child who is gone forever." ---Ruth, mother of a lesbian daughter who committed suicide; testimony submitted to the Governor's Commission.

Families of gay and lesbian teenagers need help for themselves in dealing both with their feelings and with the prejudice and mythology of the outside world. They need help as well in order to be able to advocate for the physical and emotional safety of their

It's a Gay Life!

lesbian/gay teen who must navigate through a school and social life made dangerous by those who hate or fear him/her for being different. Parents and families need help in order to alleviate the guilt and shame they feel, and to empower themselves and their son or daughter in this journey.

A free copy of *Making Schools Safe for Gay and Lesbian Youth* may be had by writing to:

State House, Room 111, Boston, MA, 02133.

or phone 617-727-3600 x 312

Who Receives the PFLAG Edmonton Newsletter?

- all PFLAG members
- several ministers and priests of Anglican, United, Catholic, Lutheran, Lambda & MCC churches
- all Canadian PFLAGs that we have addresses for
- all Edmonton Public High school counsellors
- all (but one) Edmonton Public High school police resource officers

If you wish to make a donation to PFLAG Edmonton to help support the cost of this newsletter please mail it to:

9 Coachman Way, Sherwood Park, AB, T8H 1C5.

Thank you for helping us to help our gay and lesbian youth.